

~~SECRET~~

CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S NEW LEADER CHARTS BOLD COURSE

Within a week of replacing long-time Czechoslovak party boss Novotny, Slovak leader Dubcek has moved boldly to set in motion far-reaching changes benefiting society and the individual, but he has many problems to overcome in this endeavor.

Dubcek has shown a keen awareness of the necessity for realistic responses to the serious problems facing the country, particularly on the domestic scene. He has also made clear his understanding of the needs of the people.

On 10 January the official party daily, Rude Pravo, published an article that set forth in broad outline a series of radical proposals. If implemented, these proposals would constitute a domestic policy more liberal than that of Yugoslavia. This plan presumably reflects the consensus of the central committee under Dubcek. It emphasizes that henceforth Czechoslovak democracy must always be concerned with the rights and liberties of the individual. Moreover, the party may no longer use its power to undermine this ideal "by the pressure of authority in the name of the community's interests." As a corollary, the article points out that Czechoslovakia must develop forms of administration that create "more and more room for self-administration."

The article also asserts that the party must withdraw from its

ubiquitous role in society and must remove itself from the direct administration of the government and the economy. In order to accomplish this, Czechoslovak officials, from the highest to the lowest levels, will no longer be permitted to hold both government and party posts. It appears that virtually all party leaders, as well as thousands of middle-level functionaries will be affected.

Personnel changes in the party and government, as well as structural changes in the latter, are in fact being considered. The National Assembly convened earlier this week, presumably to decide upon these shifts. Premier Josef Lenart--who, like Dubcek, is a Slovak--is almost certain to lose his job because it would be impolitic for Slovaks to hold both top party and government posts; he is also said to have supported the ousted Novotny. Other officials who may be significantly downgraded include party secretary and ideology chief Jiri Hendrych, and Foreign Minister Vaclav David, both of whom are of the Novotny mold. Novotny himself apparently will be allowed to keep the presidency at least for the time being.

In foreign policy, Dubcek may take a more nationalistic line than his predecessor, seeking better relations with the West and the US in particular, and possibly reopening talks with West Germany on the

~~SECRET~~

Approved for Release
Date JUN 1997

①

~~SECRET~~

establishment of diplomatic relations. Indeed, if the Rude Pravo article is any indication, Dubcek apparently envisions a foreign policy as independent as Rumania's.

Dubcek will need time to consolidate his position and to form a more stable coalition. This will be a complicated process because he will have to loosen the party's absolute grip on political power to make his reform programs work and to satisfy liberal demands for greater cultural and political freedom. He will undoubtedly encounter stiff opposition from many of the entrenched regional and district functionaries, who have in the past thwarted efforts at reform in order to protect their positions. In anticipation of such a response, and as a means of countering it, Dubcek has already sent selected party presidium members and certain of his Slovak party colleagues on speaking tours around the country to explain his new programs.

Novotny and his hard-line cronies remain for the present on the party presidium. Although their tenure seems limited and their influence is probably in abeyance at this point, Dubcek himself may not be able to count on the unqualified support of a majority of the presidium members. His position may have been strengthened, nevertheless, by the enlargement of the presidium by four members experienced in some of Czechoslovakia's key problem areas.

Dubcek's election appears to have been a last-minute compromise among factions within the presidium and central committee. No member of the Slovak minority has ever held the top party post, and Dubcek's activities will be closely scrutinized. Czech leaders almost certainly resent him, partly because of his youthfulness, but primarily because the Slovaks over the years have been in the vanguard of the opposition to Novotny. [REDACTED]

~~SECRET~~